

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 DHA-02 IO-13 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04
H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01
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C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 4929

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SHUM PINT TS
SUBJECT: CONFERENCE ON PUBLIC LIBERTIES

REF: STATE 148844

1. FOREIGN MINISTER HABIB CHATTY RECEIVED ME THIS MORNING AND I WENT THROUGH OTHER ITEMS ON MY AGENDA (SEE SEPTELS) BEFORE COMING TO HUMAN RIGHTS. PARADOXICALLY, OUR DISCUSSION OF RECENT OAU LIBREVILLE SUMMIT TERMINATED WITH HIS EXPRESSION OF SATISFACTION WITH RESOLUTION AGAINST NON-INTERFERENCE IN AFRICAN INTERNAL AFFAIRS BY OUTSIDE POWERS.
2. I THEN SAID I HOPED NEXT SUBJECT I WAS UNDER INSTRUCTIONS TO RAISE WOULD NOT BE TAKEN AS INTERFERENCE IN TUNISIA'S INTERNAL AFFAIRS AND PROCEEDED TO MAKE MY COMMENTS AS DIRECTED BY REFTEL ON REPERCUSSIONS IN U.S. OF GOT'S DECISION NOT TO PERMIT HOLDING OF JUNE 10 CONFERENCE AND DAMAGE THIS COULD DO TO TUNISIA'S EXCELLENT IMAGE.
3. CHATTY THOUGHT A WHILE AND SAID GOT HAS UNDERSTOOD AND APPRECIATED OUR HUMAN RIGHTS STRATEGY AGAINST COMMUNISTS AND OTHER TOTALITARIANS, BUT FOUND IT "CURIOUS/TO FIND IT NOW BEING APPLIED TO TUNISIA. HE WONDERED WHAT OTHER

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TRADITIONAL FRIENDS OF U.S. WERE BEING SIMILARLY SPOKEN TO. I SAID I HAD NO INFORMATION ON THIS POINT. HE ASKED WHAT OTHER ARAB STATES WERE BEING CRITICIZED, ADDING "ALGERIA, FOR EXAMPLE? HAVE YOU CRITICIZED BOUMEDIENE FOR THE LONG ILLEGAL INCARCERATION OF AHMED BEN BELLA?" I SAID I DID NOT KNOW THE ANSWER, BUT COULD CITE PUBLIC STATEMENTS BY PRESIDENT AND SECRETARY VANCE THAT U.S. WOULD SEEK TO

ADVANCE HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS EVERYWHERE WITH OUR FRIENDS AS WELL AS WITH THOSE WHO ARE NOT OUR FRIENDS. WE STILL CONSIDER TUNISIA A FRIEND AND WASHINGTON HAD APPARENTLY CHOSEN THIS QUIET WAY OF "WHISPERING" OUR CONCERN TO GOT OVER POSSIBLE RAMIFICATIONS OF THE JUNE 10 INCIDENT.

4. I ADDED AS AN ILLUSTRATION OF POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCES THAT WE HAD RECEIVED A RUMOR RECENTLY FROM TUNISIAN SOURCES THAT A "COMMITTEE OF ONE HUNDRED" WAS BEING ORGANIZED IN THE U.S. TO DEFEND HUMAN RIGHTS IN TUNISIA. SUCH A GROUP, I SPECULATED, COULD ASK TO BE HEARD BY CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEES CONSIDERING OUR MILITARY AND ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE FOR TUNISIA. CHATTY SAID HE HOPED GOT'S FRIENDS IN CONGRESS WOULD COME TO ITS DEFENSE. CONSIDERING ITS PRE-INDEPENDENCE HISTORY, HE CONTINUED, HE BELIEVED TUNISIA IS PROPERLY NUMBERED AMONG THE MOST PROGRESSIVE IN GUARANTEEING HUMAN RIGHTS TO ITS PEOPLE. HADN'T IT TAKEN THE U.S. MANY DECADES AND EVEN A CIVIL WAR TO ESTABLISH CIVIL LIBERTIES AT HOME? DID WE BELIEVE THAT ALL COUNTRIES COULD EXACTLY EMULATE OR WOULD WISH TO EMULATE THE U.S. EXAMPLE, HE ASKED RHETORICALLY.

5. HE THEN SAID HE HOPED THAT I, "BECAUSE YOU KNOW TUNISIA SO WELL", WILL EXPLAIN TO WASHINGTON THAT THE SMALL GROUP OF DISSIDENTS WHO TRIED TO ORGANIZE THE JUNE 10 CONFERENCE DID SO FOR PURELY POLITICAL REASONS. UNABLE TO ORGANIZE ANY

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FOLLOWING AT HOME THEY CHOSE TO CALL ATTENTION TO THEMSELVES BY BRINGING IN EXTERNAL FACTORS, HE SAID, AND WERE USING "HUMAN RIGHTS" AS A PURELY POLITICAL TOOL. THIS IS HARD TO FORGIVE. HAD THE CONFERENCE BEEN A WHOLLY TUNISIAN AFFAIR, HE ADDED, HE BELIEVED THE GOVERNMENT'S DECISION MIGHT HAVE BEEN DIFFERENT. CERTAINLY I WAS AWARE, HE HOPED, THAT THE DESTOURIAN SOCIALIST PARTY HAD ITSELF AGREED TO PARTICIPATE IN FOUNDING A TUNISIAN BRANCH OF THE LEAGUE FOR THE RIGHTS OF MAN. I ACKNOWLEDGED THAT WE HAD SO REPORTED TO WASHINGTON.

6. IN CLOSING, CHATTY SAID, HE WOULD REPORT MY DEMARCHE TO THE PRIME MINISTER AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. HE THOUGHT IT POSSIBLE THAT HE MIGHT WISH TO PROVIDE ME WITH A WRITTEN REBUTTAL. I SAID I WOULD BE HAPPY TO RECEIVE ONE.

7. COMMENT: THE TONE OF OUR CONVERSATION, AT WHICH NOTES WERE TAKEN BY THE ASSISTANT AMERICAN DESK OFFICER, WAS REASONABLY AMICABLE AND LOW-KEY. THE PRIME MINISTER, OF COURSE, HAS A LOWER BOILING POINT THEN HIS FOREIGN MINISTER.

MULCAHY

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Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 13-Jul-1977 12:00:00 am
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